

Friends,

Speech by D. Shandler

St Georges Cathedral Hall

A5.8

3/9/85

In the mid-70's ~~there~~ before the uprisings that rocked our country following the student protests in Soweto, there was one word - a foreign word - on the lips of every Cabinet minister. The embattled prime minister of the day B. J. Vorster was using any opportunity he could to utter it. And that word - detente - helped in not a single bit in ^{resolving} ~~reconciling~~ the conflict in our land. Detente was meant to reconcile the differences between the various sections of our people.

Now 10 years later the situation of our country is ironic - the townships are in turmoil, hundreds of thousands are unemployed, the demands put forward by the people are falling on deaf ears, and the economy is in a serious decline. And in the midst of all of this we are presented with another word of foreign origin. Whether we agree with its accompanying argument or not I think we can all agree that it has caught the public imagination. And the word this time - that famous

2/ ^{A looking at the past is always useful in working towards the future.} Roman river - the Rubicon. Its all good and well that P.W. Botha reads Roman History, ^{*} But perhaps he should take a closer look at his own country's ^{history} and realise that he is leading it to disaster. And if he ~~too~~ understands his Roman history he would see that what he is proposing is indeed this very road to disaster. Perhaps he meant what he said when he made that Rubicon speech. Perhaps he ~~has~~ knew what the significance of the Rubicon River was in those ancient times. If you don't mind I want to briefly tell you the story of the Rubicon. ^{you might agree it says much about the a.o's of our governments} Then you ^{What} Caesar was doing in 49 B.C. when he crossed the Rubicon to march on Rome was in fact to declare civil war. At that time Caesar was one of a group of 3 people who controlled Rome. ~~He~~ Another person in this triumvirate was Pompei. The two of them had some kind of fallout + with one thing leading to another Pompei + his allies ordered Caesar to dissolve his army. Of course Caesar being the ambitious + headstrong

3/ * govt is leading us
on a path to peace.
person that he was, refused. He mobilized
his forces + led them across the
Rubicon which was a river which
separated his province from the
rest of Italy. This act of crossing
the Rubicon was ~~a~~ in defiance of
Pompeii's + the Roman senate's
orders. ~~It~~ What it amounted to
was in fact a declaration of
civil war.

P.W. Botha has spoken of the Rubicon and
~~I think P.W. Botha would not openly have~~
~~his crossing it. He would have us believe that the *~~
~~declared a civil war. A glaring truth however~~
shines through. That is that what we
see in South Africa today is a low
intensity civil war. What has developed in
our country in the years since September
the 3rd 1984 has been the slow breakdown
of all structures of civil authority in
the townships. Whatever form of controls
existed previously have disappeared.
Where community councils might have
run townships before we now see
the military + the police stepping in
to suppress the opposition that has
grown. Where there might have been
room for peaceful protest, we now only
see room for the violence of the armed

forces, and the counter-violence of besieged communities.

And at the root of all of this is of course the system of apartheid. It was apartheid which imposed the ^{inadequate} community council structures on the people in African townships like Sebokeng. The community councillors ^{were} elected ^{by} a small minority of the population. ^{That they} sought to use their new positions to advance themselves rather than their communities. And it was the same councillors who were called ^{on} + accepted doing the dirty work of apartheid. In Sebokeng as in many other townships the spark that lit the flame was a rent hike introduced by the community council. And even though the rents were increased by just a few rand it was sufficient to incense the residents. ~~Those~~ ^{These} ~~those~~ few rand were sufficient to mean the difference between a child ^{being} ~~being~~ getting ^{adequately} ~~sufficiently~~ fed or to ~~being~~ gripped by malnutrition. Or that that child might continue going to school; or be forced to earn ~~extra~~ that little bit extra that would maintain the family.

In schools too, resistance has grown. No longer willing to accept the bantu education imposed on them, or the lack of representative SRC's, school students turned to the only effective + peaceful weapon open to them - the boycott.

But past protests + boycotts in South Africa are unlike those in democratic countries. In Europe for example the protests of the people are mostly listened to. In South Africa the only answer has been violence. Community Councils were the first to answer in this way. In Sebokeng the first shot was that of the mayor firing on a young group of protesters. Then the police were called in and finally since Oct 7 last year the army. And all in the final analysis not called in to restore law + order and as the authorities would tell us, but to put down with guns + bullets the opposition to the system of apartheid.

In this past year we have seen a growing spiral of violence, of the security forces firing on the people. And the people firing or striking back at their oppressors be they represented by their community councillors, or the police, or the army. This violence must come to an end. If not we will head further into the civil war we have already entered. In early Sept last year this conflict was confined to Sebokeng, but it soon spread throughout our country. We have seen the eye of the storm. But Botha offers us no hope. The past week in Cape Town, and in Worcester before that. Right on our doorsteps 31 people have died. We must work to stop this. We must root out its cause - the system of apartheid. It is a moral responsibility that weighs on all of us. But Botha + his empty speeches offer us little hope. The government blunder ahead. They have been caught in the spiral of violence of their own making. The people of the townships are caught in this spiral. The security forces are caught in this it. It is the young girl boycotting school, It is the young man conscripted into the SADF + pushed into the townships to carry out the defence of apartheid who is caught in this hell. In a word we are

7/

caught up in the civil war.

[The Conscript - The ECC call - TOC]

So what do we have. We have the inconsiderance of the government on the one hand. The protests + demands of the people on the other. The people are appealing to the government to listen to them in peace - They are calling on them to hear them call when ~~they say~~ ^{they say} for an end to apartheid, for the release of the political prisoners + detainees, and ~~for~~ ^{bring} democracy where every person can vote for a single government of their choosing. But these calls are falling on deaf ears.

And in the white community, we have a growing number of people who realise that it is no good looking to the Nationalist government for the answers. This growing group of people are hearing the cries of their fellow black South Africans. And at the heart of this opposition we see the conscript. The young man who has been ^{forcibly} called up into the defense force without any right to object.

The conscript who is forced into the army + then called on to enter African townships. Could the signs of a civil war be more clear. For many of these young men these signs have been perceived, and we can look at the figures to show the effects of the civil conflict on those facing national service. For the whole of last year 15 96 men failed to register with the SADF. In the January intake of this year, which was just 3 months after troops entered the townships, a figure of 7589 was recorded, a dramatic jump indeed + the ~~the~~ a jump which the ECC believes is in large part a direct result of troops being deployed in the townships. Similarly if we look at the numbers who have appeared before the board for religious objections, 350 for the whole of last year + the same number for just the first 6 months of this year.

And it not just the individual conscript who suffers. It is his family, his friends, his ~~lover~~ girlfriend, - it is everyone he is in contact with. Everyone now shares the

enormous moral dilemmas the conscript faces. It is an agonizing, an excruciating dilemma that confronts the conscript. The options available are slim indeed -

- he can go in to the SADF against his will
- if he is both sufficiently religious + a pacifist, he can obtain religious objector status
- he could leave the country
- or face the prospect of 6 years in jail for conscientious objection.

[It is for these reasons that the End Conscription Campaigner believes its work is of immense urgency. If we are to avoid an escalation in the civil war we must prevent ^{the situation where} conscripts ~~being~~ ^{are} forced to confront their fellow South Africans over the barrel of a gun. We urgently need and are calling for an immediate End to Conscription. We are not asking for a phasing out of conscription, we require for the sake of millions of South Africans a halt to this system of conscription which is fuelling the civil war.

] And if we are to press for a halt to

the hostilities we must remove the troops from the townships. Studies conducted by the SACBC + the demands put by township residents have shown that the presence of troops in the townships have increased the conflict. They have not brought peace + stability. Rather than being peacemakers they ^{are} playing the role of warmakers.

3] If calm is to be restored, ^{where} ~~in which~~ we might seriously start to address the root causes of ^{the} injustice + insecurity in our country it is vital that the troops are withdrawn from the townships. Their presence ^{there is} ~~there~~ are only fuelling the war. The actions of the police + the defense force are leading to bitterness + misery. Perhaps P.W. Botha instead of crossing the Rubicon should cross the Aapies river in Pretoria + see what is happening in the townships there. Or leave his Grootte Schuur Estate + cross the Liesbeek River + step out into the Cape Flats to see these realities.

Withdrawing the troops from the townships becomes more urgent by the hour. The End Conscription Campaign has as a result embarked on a "Troops out of the Townships" campaign. We intend to keep on reminding ourselves of the ^{unjust} role that the SADF is playing. It has become commonplace over this last year to see troops in the townships. When the army first moved into the township there was a huge outcry, but now this has all but disappeared. We must revive this ~~outrage~~ ~~of~~ awareness if we are to avoid getting too used to it. It is one of the great sadnesses of our country that too many people have become used to detentions, + worse - deaths in detention. We must not let this happen.

Our campaign then will focus on the presence of troops, of conscripts in the townships. At the core of the campaign will be a 3-week fast by Dr Ivan Toms, a Crossroads doctor +

member of the Cape Town ECC. He will be fasting for 3 weeks from the 17th of September until October the 7th here in the St George's Cathedral. Ivan will be here everyday for that period; various religious leaders have agreed to spend a day or two in fast with him over that period. You are also welcome to join him in fast, or if that won't be possible to pop-in and chat with him. ^{through} The fast ^{we} will be ^{making a call} a fast ~~one~~ for a just peace. It will be a time in which we can reflect on the conflict in our land. The fast will be an act of non-violent protest at the presence of troops in the townships. We can show our solidarity ^{with} the besieged communities at that time. And it is a way in which we can physically express our commitment to a just peace in South Africa.

The culmination of the fast will be on October the 7th. On that day we will be calling on everyone to join us in a day of fast ⁱⁿ through which we

can express our feelings.

[We have a number of other activities lined up. Meetings, displays, posters, ^{pamphlets} will all be a part of the campaign. For the campaign to have an effect it is necessary that everyone consider participating in it in some way. ^{Attend the meetings, come, + see Joan or} If you are interested you might want to participate more actively. If that is the case come + see us after the meetings.

[In all we want this campaign to succeed. We want the troops out of the townships. We want an end to the civil war + to conscription. We want peace in our land + we want it to be a just peace. We do not need Rubicous. For a better future all South Africans it is vital that we ~~work for it~~ ^{work for it} get this just peace. And if we want this ~~peace + harmony~~ it is important that ~~we work~~ for justice. That the township resident, that the young man facing the call up or being placed in the townships receives justice could not be more urgent. The ~~one~~ ^{onus} is on all of us to see that this happens.

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